

PRESS RELEASE



The Cleveland Museum of Art

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SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ETCHINGS ON VIEW AT THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

Over 100 works by four seventeenth-century printmakers--Jacques Bellange (1594-1638), Jacques Callot (1592-1635), Stefano della Bella (1610-1664), and Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (c. 1610-c. 1663/65)--are on view in the prints and drawings galleries of The Cleveland Museum of Art through July 13. Mostly composed of etchings, the exhibition also includes engravings, drawings, and oil sketches. Three pen and ink drawings are by anonymous artists and were included in the exhibition because they reflect the style, themes, and influence of the four printmakers.

Jacques Bellange completed at least forty-eight etchings during his career. His work is characterized by its treatment of the human figure, highly rhythmic compositions, and a free, inventive use of the etching medium. His art is one of the last manifestations of the international style known as mannerism. Mannerist art was often decorative and witty, depicting luxurious contemporary clothing and fantastic or exotic costume. Textures, metals, and gems were masterfully rendered. In addition, mannerist art displayed a strong underlying eroticism, even in religious art.

Three of Bellange's prints are included in the exhibition: Two Beggars Fighting, The Martyrdom of St. Lucy, and The Annunciation. These prints are considered rare because of the fine quality of their impression.

Jacques Callot was somewhat influenced by the work of Bellange although as a printmaker he was far more prolific (Callot produced some 1,500 plates). Much of Callot's early career was spent making official visual records of court festivals and theatrical performances. The Fair at Impruneta, included in the exhibition, is an example of this type of print.

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As a young artist, Stefano della Bella strove to emulate the work of Callot. He went to Rome to perfect himself as an artist and, rather than spend his time in studios studying other artists' work, he devoted as much time as he could to drawing in the open. It was during this period that della Bella moved away from the tightly technical style of Callot. His work became relaxed, almost lyrical, with figures arranged naturally rather than in a staged manner.

Later in his career, pushed by publishers in Paris, della Bella became very productive, making single and series etchings, large and small to suit many tastes and purposes. Subjects included the military, landscapes, seascapes, animals, ornament plates, theatre productions, religion, and many genre scenes. Della Bella's etchings of the four elements, Air, Earth, Fire, and Water, are included in the exhibition, as well as examples of many of the subjects which he focused upon.

In contrast to della Bella, Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione readily absorbed influences from other artists (including Bellange, Callot, and della Bella). Primarily a painter, Castiglione preferred subjects that were pastoral in setting, allowing a liberal portrayal of sheep, goats, horses, and occasionally more exotic animals such as camels or monkeys. He made sixty-seven prints, both engravings and etchings, and invented the process of monotype (Monotype is the drawing of a design free-hand in ink on a plate and then transferring that design to paper by pressing the plate onto the paper).

The highlight of the Castiglione works in the exhibition is the print Circe. (Circe was the enchantress in the Odyssey who detained Odysseus for a year and turned his men into swine.) "The quality of the impression of Circe is probably the finest in a public collection," states Anne Lockhart, assistant curator of prints and drawings at The Cleveland Museum of Art, who organized the exhibition. Two oil sketches by Castiglione are also included.

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